A Voice for IO Broadcasting: David Bailey Interview

Interviewed by John Whisenhunt, Editor

David Bailey was a visiting instructor and consultant to JIOWC in 2008. He describes his somewhat unconventional military and broadcasting backgrounds, successful use of radio in recent influence campaigns, and why IO practitioners should take greater steps in using social networking tools.

IOS*: Some say thinking like an insurgent helps you fight them. You started off as a "pirate" radio broadcaster, and ended up getting decorated by Queen Elizabeth II for a broadcasting effort that helped bring peace to a region. Tell us about that evolution.*

DB: Initially, in my mind it wasn't about helping people, or anything like that. It was more about doing something I really wanted to do. From a very young age, I wanted to be a soldier—that's a fact. But something else happened in the early 1960s: my Irish grandparents introduced me to the radio—though they didn't know they were doing it at the time. In those days in Britain, the BBC were telling us what to listen to, or perhaps we heard *Radio Luxembourg* broadcasting from continental Europe, though that was only in the evening. So, you never got any popular music or anything like that, and I was too young to go out and be a "rocker." Like most kids I would hear the music coming out of the shops along the street… and this music was really infectious! So there was this radio station called *Radio Caroline*, and I'd never heard anything like it, or presenters [announcers] like that… people who were breaking the law to broadcast. The British government of the time, under the Labour Party, tried to figure out ways to shut this pirate radio station down, and by Act of Parliament, made them illegal. Most of them did shut down, though the original *Radio Caroline* moved to the Dutch coast, and continued for a time. Even our group of four teenagers didn't think our government could get away with this. Since they weren't going to give us free radio, we decided to do it ourselves, and we launched *Radio Jackie*. We were hounded by the police, and some of my colleagues went to prison for as long as a year, for constantly annoying the magistrate and the judicial system. But, we operated through the late 1970s before closing down. One legacy is that *Radio Jackie* is now a licensed radio station in London—not as big as it used to be—but it still "is."

I went through the rites of passage, hanging around radio stations, talking to people, making the coffee and emptying the garbage. And just like it appears on TV, one day someone said to me "Do you fancy doing a radio show?" Of course, I was terrified, but exhilarated at the same time. So I thought, "at least now I've done it." I've stuck with it all along, had some highlights along the way, tried to be innovative—even when I was disabled, dealing with a very serious neurological disease in the late 1980s.

All of these things satisfied me until around 1992, when I was in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in the Army, and our regimental colonel wanted some ideas about how to do fund-raising. I said "I've got it… we run a radio station." So with a lot of assistance from British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS), we were an outrageous success. I couldn't have foreseen how things would play out. At the final wrap party, after our license was up, I was thanking the BFBS managing director for letting us use all their equipment and technical assistance, and he asked me "What do you think you've achieved?" I should have said "We've raised a lot of money for charity," but for some unknown reason what came out of my mouth was "I've set up the first British Forces radio station in this region *and you haven't*!" He asked me when I was being demobilized from the Army, and asked "Do you want a job?" Well, I'm often accused of being immature and a little wacky, but this was like having all my childhood Christmases and birthdays rolled into one. So there and then I ran

to the colonel, and as a senior warrant officer I'm babbling like a five-year-old, and told him of the offer. The colonel said "That's good news Mr. Bailey, because we have to put you on gardening leave [furlough], as we can't keep two people in the same post [billet]. So, go off and enjoy it for six months."

I stayed with them until 1996, went off to Bosnia—I'd done a number of radio projects in the Falkland Islands as well—and was asked to help get some messages out to the population in the Balkans. In 1999 the Kosovo Crisis started, and suddenly no one in our area, the northern part of Bosnia, wanted to take our programs or our magazines. The Serbs didn't want it because of what was going on in Serbia, and I believe the Muslims and Croats didn't want to take our programs because they feared if everything went wrong, the Serbs would use that against them. So we were stuck. Then one night I'm in the officer's mess in Banja Luka, and I can admit now I was feeling quite jolly and cheeky from the contents of a bottle, the Chief of Staff asked me what we should do about getting these products out. My boss was on leave, so I said "Well, it's quite easy. We have a radio studio in the old Banja Luka Metal Factory. If we just get a transmitter, we can have our own station, and say whatever we want!" The wine beat me to the answer—and shock and horror—I said "two days!" Knowing the way the British Army worked, I never thought they'd expect me to really do that—well it took two weeks not two days —but, we launched what became *Radio Oksigen*. It grew, and years down the line was very successful. The real shock was a couple of times someone decided to give me something for doing that [his decorations under the British Honours System].

IOS: Certainly those are great rewards for your work. In your talks, you introduce yourself as "not the typical guy" in this business. In the influence business we always say we need good techies as well as good creative types. You're able to work both sides. But can we recruit for that combination in the same person, or just mix a good team with some of each?

DB: Remember I was the archetypical British Sergeant Major, shined and proper, not the long-haired fellow you see today. Soldiers used to hide from me in dustbins [garbage cans]! I was not the guy you wanted to be around if you were a soldier who had transgressed the unwritten rules. Nowadays, I'm totally different. In military spheres, having someone who is truly passionate about something, who really wants to emotionally pursue the solution to something, is normally regarded as a guy we don't really want. Because in many military occupations, becoming that involved means you're not going to be good for the mission. For example, on a humanitarian operation, letting starving children and devastated peoples really get to you means you'll be less effective in doing the tasks. In my view, what we need in the IO and PSYOP business is commitment—and that is far from a 9-to-5 level, where you're worried about how much or little you're being paid—you have to actually live it. You have to be immersed in it. Sometimes it ruins your private life because you're always accused of being more concerned with helping others than in your own relationships. That's a sad fact of life. Having said all that, what sort of military guys should we look for? You'll get a lot of resumes of young soldiers the commander thinks will be good for you, and when you really read them, they are indeed top-of-the-class, smartest soldier—and I send them to the shredder, asking to see the 'real people.' I don't want "yes sir, no sir" soldiers! If you tell someone to build a bridge by nine o'clock, and you know there's no way the logistics allow for that. But when time's up, the guy still turns around and says "look what I did." He's been creative, he's used friends, he knows "the man that can," and he most likely stole something because he borrowed something someone else wasn't looking after properly. And he's passionate about what he'd done, and will bounce an idea off you, even if it sounds crazy. So, my answer is yes, we need people who are at once techie and creative. I don't think you can be effective in IO or PSYOP unless you are multi-skilled. We use many types of media: print, broadcast, Internet, so you need to be master of one of those, but with an appreciation of what other people are doing. I think the military has the most difficulty finding the articulate, creative, multitalented people because those people come with the most baggage: independent thought, a penchant for questioning.

David Bailey, MBE. (Author)

IOS: You're great advocate of lessons learned, and you talk about that in your presentations. What is your preferred method of capturing the important things from these current campaigns, so they don't become lessons forgotten?

DB: A British General named Frank Kitson wrote what I think has held up as the best book on counterinsurgency. He came up with the "inkspot" [understanding minds] logic of stopping certain elements within an operational area, those that we didn't want to win the target audiences' hearts and minds. And it worked. But it worked because everyone acknowledged that. So if we talk to the modern day general in Afghanistan or Iraq, and ask if it's working the same for him as it did for Kitner, he might say "well, we are 'inkspotting' the target audience." But you'd reply, "right, but you're not inkspotting the way he did." Why? Because what you should be doing is saying, I've read Kitner, and even though this is the 21st century, what add-ons, what new inkspots must we add, rather than say "we don't need that old doctrine any longer." Talking out of turn a bit, if inkspotting has been done properly in Iraq, why did you need the Surge? Why don't people look to the past? Is it because they're not from my culture, or nationality-or whatever background? We can say what Kitson or others did right or wrong in Malaya, see what was good and bad, say we'll never do the bad again, and use that as the basis for what we're going to do next. That to me is lessons learned. In the IO broadcast business, I suppose I could go back to WWII and do a critical assessment. One guy that I really respect is Sefton Delmar, who really pioneered influence ops in the European theater of operations, on behalf of the UK. After the war, he didn't do as well—maybe he needed chaos in order to thrive? He had the support of the government to just "go for it!" But he had help from everyone from [British Prime Minister Winston] Churchill on down. Look at how well Churchill did OPSEC!

We still have a problem though in what we're doing with our information. For example: military intelligence is like dung. You put it all together, and it stinks. But if you selectively give it out to people, it might just be the jigsaw puzzle piece that you as an IO guy need to complete the picture-and build a new dynamic platform for getting the word out. It's a two-way street: in both my Bosnia and Afghanistan operations, we give everything we get back to the intelligence section. I might not know what they're actually looking for, but what I feel is of no consequence might be just the puzzle piece the intelligence section needs.

IOS: A lot of people are looking for the next big thing, and in your presentation you're quite an advocate

for new media. But do we go too far, throwing out something traditional like broadcasting—in which you've been so successful—and replacing it too soon? How do you balance traditional and new media?

DB: What I like to bring to a mission commander is the biggest toolbox, with the greatest range of tools we can provide. Let's give them all we have. Yet I don't have all the ones I want, because a few of them haven't been made yet—though I'd like to make them. In a nation's IO armory I would have shortwave radio, longwave AM, FM, and digital radio—having a great take-up in Europe nowadays, and by satellite in North America. I need to have all these ready, because I'm like the guy on *Home and Garden Television* who's already under the sink. I can't pop down to the hardware store for a wrench. I need to have it in my kit already, else I'll waste time and lose customers and opportunities. Not all new ideas excite me, but they must be useful because so many people are using them. My toolkit would also have mobile printing presses, video and film, digital imaging, and the ability to dominate the Internet through social media platforms. Someday shortwave will die, when no one listens any longer, and we'll need to put it to bed. Should it gather dust in a hanger for thirty years just in case? If not, well, we can't wait for a government procurement process to get another one! I don't think I'm a Luddite [one opposed to technological change], but in this fast-moving time, I think some military leaders are 21st century Luddites.

IOS: You use the expression "response to influence." Determining performance, finding measures of effectiveness are critical, yet the truth can't simply be a lot of statistics. Where is the "truth" of how our influence campaigns are working?

DB: You have to realize that influence *is* a military weapons system, deployed for a reason. In something traditional like armor, the aim is to go forward, destroy or neutralize he target, or move onward. Until there

is quantifiable evidence that the tank is out of action, the mission does not progress. Quite rightly so, a commander has to know how we're doing, how many losses, how much damage, and how we'll modify the plan and get forward with things. What we do is no exception. But in radio it's very difficult to quantify things accurately. Despite what a lot of folks say about surveys, and yes we pay them the money to do these, it's not an exact science—I think they're just bluffing! In the influence operations environment, we need to know if we have listeners, and what will those listeners do? Some things we might be able to prove, and some we'll never be able to prove. For example, how many responded to our message of not supporting suicide bombers? I firmly believe in "results related," and the only way we can do that is by having audience interactivities. For example, in Bosnia our surveys showed we had listener take up—and you can always prove anything you want with statistics —yet we always had the naysayers or "crows" (remember, a collective of crows is called a "murder"). One way of measuring is doing all of your own posters, handbills, and broadcasts, that way you know if a listener received something, he got it from the military. Or, host a gathering or party and see how many people turn up—because they either heard your broadcast, read your newspaper, or spoke to somebody that did. Once you see that, it helps give the commander a warm, cozy feeling that he's not wasting money. I can say to him: see, two thousand people here heard us. But you need the constant interactivity: ringing up the station on their mobile phones, sending SMS text, participating in talk shows.

Yet, my end state is very "Monty Python," [British comedy troupe] where we need to answer "What have the Romans ever done for us?" You come back to the operational area and the station has evolved, and people don't realize you did this, they say "What do you mean you were here? We did this!" This is where we need to get to, where we facilitate the audience solving their own problems, convincing their own leaders

to do things—and thinking they wanted to do it all along.

IOS: We talk about getting people to the table for a dialogue. But what about virtual or cyber dialog? Can these work as well as face-to-face meetings?

DB: Sure. Look at French entrepreneur Loic Le Meur, who's launched *Seesmic*. He's a great advocate of having a conversation... of having a chat. A lot of what he talks about resonates with me, and I see how we can employ those in the influence operations battlespace. People love to talk; they like the intimacy of talking, and trust is bred from getting to know people. You tend to solve problems better when you have the intimacy of a close conversation, because you get to know someone. All over the Internet you can go places and see people from a lot of different cultures engaged in conversation. Yet at the end of the day, we're not all the same—we have niche needs, whether we want to argue about our favorite team, or the ingredients list of Shiner Beer [local Texas product]. We've been pretty successful using our transmission systems to get our message out, but even with something like talk radio, you can only do—or facilitate—so much. But if we take the next step using available technology, and the suitable social media platforms, and start to integrate them, we now get out target audience, whoever they may be, *to start a conversation*. In Afghanistan today, I tend to criticize people who say they are doing focus groups and the like, and claim we are meeting the Afghans on a one-to-one basis in free and open environment—I mean, that's "pie-in-the-sky" isn't it? Those who sit down with us are the ones who are worried about what happens when we leave, and there's a lot of peer pressure. We're normally meeting people in a shura [local council] environment, which means we are primarily talking to the village elder, who'll be supported by the next tier of people. But he won't always be able to express his individual views, because he is a community spokesman. Younger members of the community probably don't want to come up to a

soldier dressed as "Robocop" and start a chat. I learned this years ago working with the metropolitan police: the sooner they take their hats off, the better the kids respond to the message of supporting the police. As Army recruiters, my corporal and I eventually wore t-shirts, and addressed each other by first name—which you'd never do—because the kids didn't understand our culture. Yet we can't go into places in Afghanistan without body armor on, because we don't know what's going to happen. So with that security level in place, for years perhaps, how do we engage people in meaningful conversation? The only way is by encompassing new means, new technologies. But people say "That's all well and good, David, but the mullah in this area doesn't have Internet." He's not our target: we're not going to change someone who's that old and "in mindset." Anyone who thinks we'll change these key communicators is frankly from a different planet! The people who are going to change things are the "new Afghanistan," those people we call "the uncommitted" in our info ops business. If we are successful, the uncommitted will form the new Afghanistan, in the image they want, and the ultraconservatives will be talking to the clouds, because traditional shura will no longer be there. The young people are becoming more and more tech savvy, and we should be communicating in ways that they like - in ways that excite them. They all have cell phones, and I'm not always sure if those are status symbols or a true primary communications means, but if they have one, I want to be able to talk to them. And I want to talk to them in ways they like... in ways that excite them. Better yet, I want them to be calling my radio station in Khandahar, and be unable to bear being away from it! Most young Afghans work and work very hard for that phone, some probably haven't eaten to save for it, and some buy a deluxe model with an onboard radio. Now they can listen to what they want, and communicate with who they want—and they can't bear the thought of not having that phone. Maybe the family bought a second radio, and guess what? The kid's father is now listening to my station as well. This is anecdotal, but it shows how youth, and all of us embracing social media platforms, can make connections. People who say "well, they're just living in caves," have got it all wrong.

Afghans love talking, whether about poetry or stories or issues. It doesn't matter what the topic is: building a dam in their district, who's running for election, should we let the Taliban in here—those things get you into intimate conversations. As long as we're being fair and morally right, they'll respect what we say, even if they disagree–and that can help us find a new way forward. But it's going to be a tough sell in this campaign, as some of our own planners still expect Ahmed in Wakhan District, and Hizmarrah in Arghandab Valley and Abdullah in Khandahar to sit around a table, but that's not what they're doing. Tribal and historic reasons would keep them apart... wouldn't let them associate at all. This is where social networking tools become the icing on the cake. People are already using *Twitter* and *Pownce*, and *Seesmic*, and what I'd really like to see us develop similar sorts of tools for IO use. When people who have gotten to know one another have actual "meet ups," they often find they have developed a relationship with someone from a background they wouldn't previously have been too keen about. That breaks down a lot of barriers, and might just break down some historical hatred. Can you imagine eight different people from eight different tribes now speaking that wonderful Pastun expression that translates as "I love you, brother." I think it's achievable, and where we should go next.

IOS: That's quite a call for action, with a lot of potential, should someone take action.

DB: Sometimes the hard part is just getting through our layers, our folks who say "well, we've studied the Afghans, and that will never work." I don't know everything, but I know sometimes you have to give it a shot—and fortunately sometimes it works! I say that because then the leadership expect you to score a goal every time, and certainly none of us can do that. But I do love it when an educated expert says "prove me wrong."

IOS: David, we've really enjoyed your visit. Thank you for joining us.

DB: It's been great. I've loved every minute, thank you.